

Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Pink ribbon lapel pins...fundraiser events...and public service announcements touting the benefits of early detection are some of the ways Leon County will commemorate Breast Cancer Awareness month. In 1985, national leaders designated October for a month-long effort focusing on early detection. The goal is to promote awareness, mammographies and self examinations. Now, more than twenty one years old, the message behind Breast Cancer Awareness Month is supported by some positive statistics:

- Mammography rates have more than doubled for women age 50 and older, from 27 percent in 1987 to 69 percent in 1998
- Breast cancer deaths have declined by 1.6 percent between 1989 and 1995

But health advocates are not resting on the strong numbers. The American Cancer Society estimates more than 200,000 new cases of invasive breast cancer and 58,500 non-invasive will be diagnosed among women in the United States this year. Statistics show approximately 40,000 women will die of the disease. It is the most frequent diagnosed cancer among women, second only to skin cancer. Yet an early diagnosis can be a good thing. There is a five year survival rate for 98% of the people whose cancer has not spread beyond the breast. Health officials are using this month's commemoration to target women who are still not making breast cancer screening part of their overall health care. In Florida, this is especially true for elderly, minority, and low income women.

"There are still women who do not take advantage of early detection at all and others who do not get mammography screenings and clinical breast exams at regular intervals," Department of Health Secretary M. Rony François, M.D., M.S.P.H., Ph.D., said. "DOH encourages Florida's women (age 40 and older) to request a mammogram with the rest of their annual medical examinations, especially on Friday, October 21 – National Mammography Day."

A yearly mammography is recommended starting at the age of 40 and continuing for as long as a woman is in good health. Clinical breast exams and breast self-examinations are important screening tools for younger women, especially if you are "at risk":

- Family history of breast cancer/altered breast cancer genes
- Obesity/weight gain
- Previously having benign breast disease
- Various hormone-related links

Leon county women can find information on screening methods and treatment options at tables located within the Roberts and Stevens Clinic on Old Bainbridge Road, the Municipal Way Clinic and the Orange Avenue site. There is also an annual fundraiser walk planned by the Leon County Chapter of the American Cancer Society on October 23rd called "Making Strides Against Breast Cancer" <http://www.kintera.org/faf/home/default.asp?ievent=108509>. The non-competitive 3-K (5 mile) walk raises awareness and funds to fight breast cancer. Businesses, churches, and social groups can sponsor a "team". Breast cancer survivor and walk chairperson Cari Roth encourages everyone to participate, volunteer, or show up to rally for a good cause.

"The local walk is a great way to raise money for a good cause and show your support for your neighbors who are fighting this disease."

The walk will take place at Southwood on Sunday, October 23rd at 3:00pm. Registration begins at 1:30. There is no fee to participate; walkers can raise money by collecting donations for every mile they complete.

Statewide, there are also 16 sites offering the Florida Breast and Cervical Cancer Program. This program was created in 1994 through a federal grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). It provides information, support, and critical screening services to less fortunate, uninsured, or under-insured women ages 50-64. The program aims to remove barriers and boost the number of women able to obtain screening.

To find the nearest site, call the toll-free hot line number at (800) 451-2229

- Or log onto: www.cancer.gov, www.cdc.gov, www.cancer.org

For additional information about the Florida Department of Health's breast cancer program, visit the DOH Web site at www.doh.state.fl.us (select Florida Breast and Cervical Cancer Program from the drop box.)

